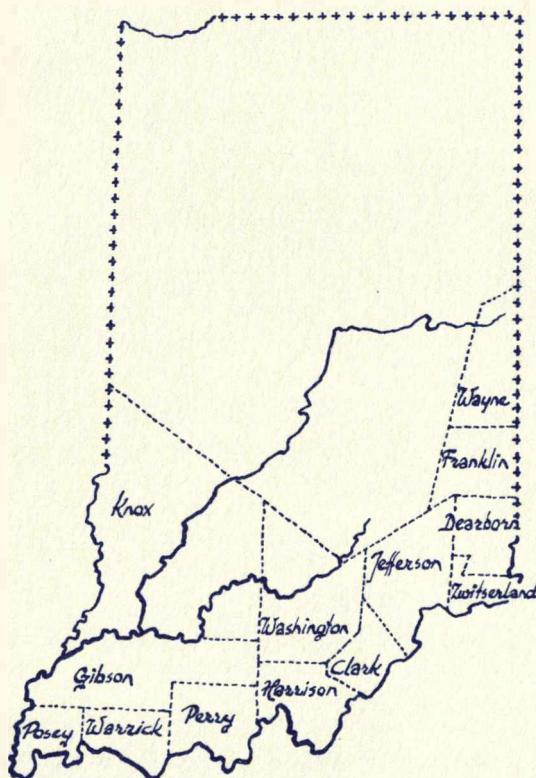


INDIANA - 1816

Indiana in 1816



County Boundary Lines in 1816 in Indiana
at the time of its application for ad-
mission to the Union ~

Property of
Vigo County Historical Society

Indiana in 1816

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An address by Rex M. Potterf delivered before the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society (December 12, 1928), at the Swinney Homestead, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the anniversary of Indiana's admission to the Union one hundred and twelve years ago.

One of a historical series, this pamphlet is published under the direction of the governing Boards of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

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In 1842, Robert Dale Owen, who was representative in Congress from Indiana, was twitted by a member from Maryland during the tariff debate with being a foreigner. Mr. Owen, with ready wit, replied: "Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Maryland is an American by chance; I am one by choice. I had no control over the place of my birth; could I have chosen the spot it would have been in the pocket of Indiana." I dare say that most of us assembled here tonight are citizens of Indiana by chance, but, whatever our origin, we can unite in commemorating the natal day of the Commonwealth of Indiana, admitted to the Union one hundred and twelve years ago.

Although admitted in 1816 to the Union, Indiana was very sparsely settled. A half-dozen pioneers, located within a few miles of each other, constituted a large settlement for that time. Only thirteen Indiana counties existed in that year, and these were located along the Ohio River. Settlement proceeded so rapidly after the admission of the State, however, that the legislature organized new counties at every session. In the session of 1816-17, four were organized, and in 1817-18, nine were organized. Less than one-fourth of the State had as yet been ceded to the white man. More than half the State's area was an Indian hunting ground.

In 1816 and for almost three decades thereafter, means of transportation and communication were either primitive or else nonexistent. In 1824 President Monroe's annual message was reported in an Indiana newspaper two months after its transmission to Congress. Information about the doings of the General Assembly was always disseminated by lengthy epistles from local representatives to the home newspapers. There was not one mile of turnpike in 1816, and the only substitute was Indian trails, which were available for horseback riding only. The senators and representatives in Congress who first represented Indiana required twenty-eight days riding on horseback to reach Washington. The National Road was not opened until 1818, and it remained until 1852, when the first railroad was completed, the only highway for travel and mail from east to west. Road building was deemed

of prime importance; early laws were generous in the allotment of twelve days per year of each male citizen's time for road-work. Steamboats plied the Ohio as early as 1815 but were of little practical service for some time thereafter. In 1816 interest in canal building was already manifested, but this was too long delayed in consummation. Ki-ki-on-ga (Fort Wayne) was the converging point of many Indian trails from its vantage point in command of the Wabash portage, but there were no other arteries of transportation.

The fauna of Indiana was more extensive and varied in 1816 than now seems possible. Even then, buffaloes were disappearing, although they were not yet extinct. Wolves were such a menace to hogs that the state legislature placed a bounty of one dollar per head upon their slaughter. Wild turkeys were so numerous that they crowded hogs from their feed. Squirrels were very numerous in some counties and damaged the corn to a great extent. Farmers in Switzerland County organized against them; in one raid they slew 13,006 squirrels. Other wild game were mink, otter, catamount, Canadian lynx, porcupine, deer, and bear.

Indian warfare had ceased on any organized scale early in 1814. The Battle of Tippecanoe, and the victory of Commodore Perry on Lake Erie had largely removed the menace of organized warfare, but the Indian still remained a factor in frontier life. Roving war parties infested the Wabash country and menaced travelers. In the central and northern sections there were as yet no settlers. The cruelty of the Indians of Indiana has not been exaggerated. In 1816 they had a stake or post located just west of Yorktown in Delaware County where they burned their prisoners. Not until 1818 was the Treaty of St. Mary's negotiated whereby the Indians' claim to eight and one-half million acres in the central and northern part of the State was relinquished.

One of the traditions for which 1816 is remembered is its inclement weather. It was extraordinarily cold. Trees and shrubs were killed from frost after budding. In June the temperature was below freezing most of the time. In July frost and ice were common, and in August conditions

were, if anything, worse. December turned out to be the best month of the year.

With the cessation of the War of 1812 and its attendant dangers, settlement began in earnest. The flow of immigration, stimulated by the end of the war, was accelerated by distressing economic conditions in the East. By the year 1816 a veritable flood of immigration was on its way to Indiana. By the summer of 1816 lands on the Wabash River had been surveyed and were on sale in Vincennes. In one day, it is said, fifty wagons passed through Zanesville, Ohio, for Indiana.

The agitation for statehood found its origin in the political dissatisfaction over the power of the territorial governor, and in the feeling that the federal government had not been sufficiently active in protecting the border from Indians. The War of 1812 had demonstrated the advantages of a military highway to the Northwest, and this had turned congressional attention to Indiana. Under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, a population of sixty thousand had been designated as the minimum population for statehood. An enumeration of settlers made at the time indicated that this number had been passed. The territorial legislature meeting in 1815 now turned its attention to the issue of statehood, and with all possible energy, memorialized Congress to confer statehood upon the Indiana Territory. That Indiana had a political organization functioning is demonstrated by the fact that this same legislature enacted thirty-one laws and seven joint resolutions.

The enabling act for Indiana's admission was delayed, along with other needed legislation, because of a controversy over the compensation of legislators; in due time the enabling act was passed, with other public business. The same Congress passed enabling acts for Mississippi and Alabama. Indiana thus became the nineteenth state of the Union, and the sixth after the formation of the federal Constitution.

The transition of Indiana from territory to statehood was made most expeditiously. It has been said by some that this haste was in part the desire to secure admission before

travel was made impossible in the fall. The enabling act was passed April 19, and the election for delegates to the Constitutional Convention was held May 13. Sessions of the Convention began June 10, and the Convention had completed its labors by June 19, 1816. Little concerted action seems to have been manifested by political groups, partly because practically all the settlers were followers of Jefferson. No definite issue appears to have been before the people.

In its deliberations the Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1816 seems to have been influenced largely by the fundamental laws of Kentucky and Ohio. Little new was incorporated into the document there formed. These men were in no sense political geniuses, neither could they take time to create a constitution anew. Rather they were practical men with absorptive minds who really accepted what in their judgement seemed to meet their needs. The committee system of organization was adopted, and twelve committees evolved the final plan. Thus, the Indiana Constitution of 1816 was typical of its day. Divorces were granted by legislative enactment. The legislature rather than the governor possessed executive authority. A comprehensive plan for public education was provided, although not immediately executed. To conform with the Jeffersonian proposal that constitutions should be revised every twenty years, provision was made for an election every twelfth year to determine the popular will relative to constitutional revision. Not until 1849 did the popular vote indicate a wish for a new constitution. The work of the Convention was final; the document was not submitted to the people but went into effect at once.

The election for state and county officers was warmly contested in some parts of the State and issues were largely personal. The three principal political leaders were Noble, Jennings, and Hendricks. Matters were so arranged that each leader would share in the distribution of offices. The governorship fell to Jennings; Hendricks became Indiana's first representative in Congress; Noble became our first United States senator.

The first General Assembly after statehood was busied

with numerous matters attendant upon a growing pioneer community, but it had time to make preparation for a state library. A dozen or more acts were passed, among which were those to punish manstealing, giving false certificates of manumission, dueling, incest, Sabbathbreaking and profane swearing. The two latter statutes have descended to us with but little change in phraseology. The type of problem demanding attention from the lawmakers was little different in principle from those of today, i. e., revenue and taxation, internal improvements, public education, roads, militia, and location of the state capital. Of course, in form the issues were vastly different. The last is only of academic interest today.

Beginning in 1816 the standard of living began to rise rapidly in Indiana, and people were no longer satisfied with the poverty of independence. Rather they began to increase their dependence and their consumption of additional commodities. Contemporary newspapers indicate a rapid increase in the variety of articles advertised for sale. By 1818 commercial advertisements occupied a large space in the VINCENNES SUN.

While slavery was forbidden by the Northwest Ordinance in Indiana, some enterprising slave owners from Dixie evaded the spirit of this law; they first manumitted their slaves and immediately thereafter entered into a contract with their former slaves for indentured servitude with a term as long as thirty years. More than one man-hunt was carried across the Ohio River into Indiana by southern slaveowners. In the long run these man-hunts tended to turn sentiment against slavery.

The INDIANA GAZETTE (1800-1810), later succeeded by the VINCENNES SUN, was the first newspaper published in Indiana. By 1816 four other papers had been established at Corydon, Brookville, Madison, and Vevay.

In a primitive community as Indiana was then, public sentiment demanded that punishments be drastic. The usual penalties were whipping, putting in stocks, the pillory, fines, imprisonment, and disfranchisement. The whipping post

was in vogue in every Indiana county until its discontinuance in 1820. Stealing of livestock was punished by very harsh penalties, partly because of the prevalence of this crime and partly because of the importance of livestock in a pioneer community. Horse stealing on a second offense became a capital crime. Branding was inflicted on those convicted of manslaughter.

Of all the public questions confronting the pioneers, that of a circulating medium was as acute as any. The only specie ever seen was the coin of British and Spanish origin. For small change the Spanish dollar was divided into quarters, eights, and sixteenths. These were called "bits," "two-bits," and "fo-pence" pieces. A "fip" was equal to five cents. Barter was used in all transactions and created innumerable difficulties. Government sale of land was affected by it. Such specie as went in exchange for government lands was drained to Washington and not left in Indiana. The acceptance of all sorts of produce, from cordwood to maple sugar, became necessary. This intense need for currency, accompanied by the spirit of speculation in land and town lots at the time of statehood, created an ideal opportunity for the issuance of unsecured paper currency. Banking institutions, founded at Vincennes and Madison in 1817 to meet the need, issued far more currency than they could redeem. When the crisis of 1819 occurred, it fell with redoubled weight upon Indiana.

The fertility of Indiana soil made for a miasmatic condition productive of ague, chills, fever, milk sickness, and cholera. Physicians were scarce, and quacks were plentiful. These ailments were mistreated in such manner that death was almost inevitable. Some of the standard remedies were bloodletting, calomel, jalep, hot water, corn-meal gruel, exclusion from the air, and blisters. Charms were a great reliance in all quarters. Root doctors, or in other words, quacks, who claimed to cure with roots, were prevalent. Some physicians made no distinction between calomel and calamus.

Religious notions among the pioneers were real and vi-

tal. The commandments were observed literally, and Sabbath observance was carried to the extremes of Puritan Massachusetts. Certain Sunday observances lasted until midnight; the day was aptly called the "long Sunday."

This cross section of Indiana pioneer life is similar in some respects to that of other communities of the Old Northwest. To a certain point they have the same earmarks, but beyond that there is wide divergence. From the vantage point of one hundred and twelve years, one can see their struggles and discern their errors; in their hard battle for existence, they wrought for us a heritage which makes possible the social milieu in which we move.